

# Peace is in our hands



OCESSED  
SEP 19 2017  
U LIBRARY

 The INQUIRER £1  
[www.inquirer.org.uk](http://www.inquirer.org.uk)

The voice of British and Irish Unitarians and Free Christians Issue 7922 9 September 2017

# The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

Established 1842

The Inquirer is the oldest  
Nonconformist religious newspaper

**"To promote a free and inquiring  
religion through the worship of  
God and the celebration of life; the  
service of humanity and respect for  
all creation; and the upholding of the  
liberal Christian tradition."**

*From the Object passed at the  
General Assembly of the Unitarian and  
Free Christian Churches 2001*

**The Inquirer** is published fortnightly  
by The Inquirer Publishing Company  
(2004), Registered Charity 1101039.

**Editor** M Colleen Burns MA

46A Newmarket Road

Cringleford

Norwich NR4 6UF

ph: 01603 505281

e: [inquirer@btinternet.com](mailto:inquirer@btinternet.com)

**Copyeditor** Sarah Reynolds

**Cover** Shutterstock photo

**Articles** express the views of their authors. Submissions are welcome and may be edited for content and length. They should be emailed or typed and should be the author's original work or be attributed appropriately.

**Subscribe** Annual subscriptions are £35 with discounts for bulk orders. Cheques payable to 'The Inquirer'. Write to James Barry

24 Lodge Lane  
Keymer, Hassocks  
West Sussex, BN6 8NA  
ph: 01273 844940

e: [admin@inquirer.org.uk](mailto:admin@inquirer.org.uk)

**Advertise** for £6 per column cm, on 3-col page, plus VAT or £7.50 per col cm, on a 2-col page. A one-page supplement is £200. One column on a 2-col page is £100, on a 3-col page, £75. A5 fliers may be inserted for £95 plus VAT. Contact the editor for details.

**Births, marriages and deaths** are 50p a word plus VAT.

**Find out more** about Unitarians

[www.unitarian.org.uk](http://www.unitarian.org.uk)

or email [info@unitarian.org.uk](mailto:info@unitarian.org.uk)

The General Assembly, Essex Hall

1-6 Essex Street

London WC2R 3HY

ph: 0207 2402384



## Inquiring Words

We can never obtain peace in the outer world until we make peace with ourselves.

– Dalai Lama

## We can create peace

I am not much of a country music fan. But one of my favourite songs is in that genre. It's called, 'Something that we do'. Some of the lines, written by Clint Black, are:

*Love is certain, love is kind  
Love is yours and love is mine  
But it isn't something that we find  
It's something that we do.*

And:

*We're on a road that has no end  
And each day we begin again  
Love's not just something that we're in  
It's something that we do.*

I like the idea that love is an active thing – not something we fall in, not something that simply exists. It's something we do.

I believe peace-making is the same. It is not a passive thing. There is no such thing as a static state of peace – particularly in a world that seems to be on fire right now.

That's why I am happy to publish the Rev Kate Whyman's article on peace. I write soon after yet another bout of sabre rattling between the leaders of North Korea and the US. And a missile has just lit up the skies over Japan. The background fear of terrorism follows us on holiday or sits with us at big, joyful events. And, the terrible effects of generations turning our backs on the Earth rise like the tide swallowing Houston.

A sane and practical response is to withdraw, hold the people we love close and turn off the media. But better to do as the Dalai Lama and other great people of faith suggest and create peace, work at it. Create it among our families and friends, our communities. Bring peace into existence.

One way to do that is to mark this year's Unitarian Peace Sunday on 21 October. Created by a motion proposed by the Unitarian Peace Fellowship, Unitarian Peace Day reminds us that peace-making is something that we can do. For more information on the Peace Fellowship see: [www.ukunitarians.org.uk/peace/](http://www.ukunitarians.org.uk/peace/)

– MC Burns

## With thanks

This colour issue of *The Inquirer* is sponsored by Mr David E Gillman, worship secretary at the Great Meeting House Coventry, to celebrate his 40-year association with the congregation. An article on the history of Coventry Unitarians appears on page 11. Support the Coventry congregation on Facebook here: <http://bit.ly/2es8CRt>

# Treading softly on others' dreams

Peace is something that we do. No matter how difficult things are, we mustn't withdraw from the world in despair says **Kate Whyman**

Frederick Buechner, the American writer, theologian and Presbyterian minister says that peace might not be 'the absence of struggle' but rather 'the presence of love'.

I find that shift in perception enormously liberating.

Partly because 'struggle' is surely sometimes good and necessary. Where would we be without many of the struggles of the past? The struggle against slavery, or against apartheid? The struggles of trade unions, and the suffragettes, and the civil rights movement, for example? So, though I am against war and killing, I am also entirely in support of freedom from oppression in all its manifestations – and such freedom can often only be won through some sort of struggle, if not necessarily a violent one. To struggle is to care, to be passionate, to want a better world and to be prepared to take risks to achieve it – even perhaps to put your life on the line for it.

To struggle is to reach towards wholeness.

## Helpless and hopeless

But even more than that, the concept of peace as 'the presence of love' moves us from a place of helplessness and hopelessness to a place of possibility. It moves us from merely idealistic aspiration towards some kind of realistic action.

We may all feel overwhelmed and despondent – despairing, even, at times – about the levels of brutality and cruelty in the world. Particularly at the moment when there seems to be so much suffering and pain everywhere we look. It's tempting to stop watching the news altogether in order to protect ourselves from words and images that disturb and distress and about which we may feel we can do little. Or we may continue to watch, but find ourselves hardened, detached. A sense of futility may turn into apathy, as though nothing we do could make any difference. So what's the point in trying? In fact, what's it got to do with us, anyway? People make war. They oppress and they hurt and they kill each other. They always have, and they always will. We may think that's just how the world is.

It's easy to wish someone else would sort it all out – magic the problems away. But my second response is 'No, that just won't do. A spiritual life cannot be simply about me. It's meaningless, and it lacks integrity if it doesn't reach out to those suffering and in need.'

But how? I don't have answers to the world's problems. I can't stop the horrors of famine or terrorist attacks.

But that doesn't mean, surely, that I can't – that we can't – do anything at all.

Let me take a short diversion.

## Faiths speak from the heart

I'm a member of the Plymouth Council of Faiths. And, at one of our meetings we decided rather than launch straight into the long and somewhat dry list of items on the agenda, we would try something different. At the suggestion of the

(Continued on next page)



Suffrage was a cause worth disturbing the peace. Suffragettes protested for votes for women outside Essex Hall on Essex Street, London. Photo provided by Derek McAuley

# A chance to open hearts and minds

(Continued from previous page)

Quaker representative, who's a feisty woman (and a mean bridge player, by the way) two members of the group – one an Anglican priest and the other a Buddhist – took it in turns to read short pieces from their own sacred texts on the subject of peace. Two of them are printed below and on the facing page – the Beatitudes from the Gospel of Matthew and an extract from 'Discourse on Love' from the Buddhist Metta Sutta.

They are both beautiful pieces of writing in their own rights. It seems to me that they capture something at the heart of both Christianity and Buddhism – something at the heart of humanity, actually – that yearns for a more gentle and loving universe, one of peace, compassion and justice, a world beyond suffering.

But what struck me most about the exercise was not so much the language of texts, or even the messages they carry – inspiring though they are – but rather the beauty of the process itself, of two people sharing their sacred texts with a group of people from different faiths.

I was moved by the inclusive atmosphere of respectful and attentive listening that grew in the room, and by the genuine desire to receive and to engage with each other. It felt honest and naked. It felt as though there was love in the room. I'm a fairly recent addition to the group, but a long-standing member said spontaneously: 'This is the best thing we've ever done'.

It takes courage and trust to expose your beliefs – and your self – to another person who thinks differently. 'Tread softly for you tread on my dreams,' wrote WB Yeats, and so we did.

## Listen and learn

In a similar spirit, Plymouth Unitarians held a weekend festival of music and storytelling from different cultures. It included a gong bath, storytellers from West African and Jewish traditions, singing from the Christian tradition and a wonderful performance of Celtic harp. The intention was to create a space where people from different cultures could share something of their backgrounds in a way that revealed something about them – and which, in turn, revealed something about each one of us in the audience, too. We listened, and we learned.



*Families flee Mosul's Old City as soldiers battle for IS's last bit of territory in Mosul, Iraq on 2 July. Photo by H Murdock/VOA [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons*

I'm not deluded enough to think that half a dozen people reading the Bible and the Metta Sutta together in a church hall on a Tuesday afternoon, is going to bring an end to global conflict any time soon. Neither am I labouring under the illusion that a weekend of music and storytelling will bring justice to the people of Iraq or Syria or prevent catastrophic damage to our environment. But what they might do is open a few hearts and minds here and there. They might just shift the possibilities in one small corner of the world.

And isn't that all that is asked of us? To make the switch from despair at the enormity of the task and from the desire to give up, to simply setting about building peace and justice where we are and where we can, in whatever way we can. And we can.

## Weeping is a loving reaction

Andrew Harvey says: 'The only sane and useful human reaction is heartbreak'. That may be so. There will be times when all we can do is weep alongside those in pain.

But it is also true that you and I can still bring love and

*(Continued on next page)*

## Metta Sutta: a discourse on love by Thich Nhat Hanh

He who wants to attain peace should practise being upright, humble, and capable of using loving speech. He will know how to live simply and happily, with senses calmed, without being covetous and carried away by the emotions of the majority. Let him not do anything that will be disapproved of by the wise ones. And this is what he contemplates:

May everyone be happy and safe, and may their hearts be filled with joy.

May all living beings live in security and peace, beings who are frail or strong, tall or short, big or small, visible or not visible, near or far away, already born or yet to be born. May all of them dwell in perfect tranquillity.

Let no one do harm to anyone. Let no one put the life of anyone in danger. Let no one, out of anger or ill will, wish anyone any harm.

Just as a mother loves and protects her only child at the risk of her own life, we should cultivate boundless love to offer to all living beings in the entire cosmos. Let our boundless love pervade the whole universe, above, below, and across. Our love will know no obstacles, our heart will be absolutely free from hatred and enmity. Whether standing or walking, sitting or lying, as long as we are awake, we should maintain this mindfulness of love in our own heart. This is the noblest way of living.

Free from wrong views, greed, and sensual desires, living in beauty and realising perfect understanding, those who practise boundless love will certainly transcend birth and death.

– From 'Teachings on Love' by Thich Nhat Hanh

# There can't always be grand gestures

(Continued from previous page)

understanding into any situation we encounter. We can bring love and a genuine desire and willingness to understand. We can bring it to a struggle in our own hearts; to a falling out in our own family; or to an injustice we perceive in our own community. We can do that. We can even actively seek out those dark situations and bring – not our bright ideas, nor our quick fixes – but our genuine willingness to understand. And we can, if we wish, choose a cause in the world that particularly moves us, find the charity that best supports it, and support them.

These are not grand gestures. They won't save the world, or make poverty history, or end war.

That's not within our gift. But what *is* in our gift is to make a difference where we feel moved to do so, and where we can.

Kathleen McTigue watched a stonemason at work and wrote that she believed: 'there is a place for each of us, that our gifts – the shape of our minds and talents, the angles of our interest and concern – fit the needs of the world the way my neighbour's stones anchor themselves in the lengthening wall. I mean that the world's possibilities shift and change each time we put ourselves into building something.'

May we, at a time when our planet seems riven with conflict and oppression, determine to put ourselves into building something; and not turn away in despair but rather bring love into every conflict and injustice we encounter, whatever it may be.

## Funds available for Unitarians to have some FUN

By Valerie Chamberlain

The Findhorn Unitarian Network (FUN) is organising a second residential visit to the Findhorn community in Scotland, following a highly successful trip there in January. Planned for 27 January to 3 February 2018, organisers are now inviting applications from interested Unitarians.

The organisers are keen that as many people as possible have the opportunity to apply to join, and welcomed the news that the General Assembly had recently announced the provision of three bursaries for people in leadership roles in Unitarian societies and districts to attend in 2018, to support the Unitarian General Assembly's 'Next Steps' priority of encouraging collaboration with other bodies and providing enhanced training opportunities. Further generous support has just been announced by the Wood Green Trust to part-fund up to three Unitarians aged under 40.

The Findhorn Foundation is a globally recognised spiritual, ecological and educational charity near Inverness in Scotland. The FUN Experience Week provides a unique opportunity to experience, learn from and reflect on the spiritual principles and activities on which the community is based, in the supportive company of fellow Unitarians from all over the UK.

## Beatitudes

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him.

Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

– New Revised Standard Version Bible

And then let us let God and the Universe take care of the rest...

*The Rev Kate Whyman is minister at Plymouth Unitarian Church; Pound Square Unitarian Chapel, Cullompton; and has pastoral oversight at Cross Street Unitarian Chapel in Moretonhampstead. Unitarian Peace Sunday is observed annually on the third Sunday in October, which this year falls on the 21st.*



The previous group returned with insights both for their own lives and Unitarian communities. Six months on from their visit, individuals cite lasting impacts, such as engaging in daily spiritual practice, the introduction of more ecologically friendly practices in their homes and ways of being more 'mindful' in everyday communication. Without exception participants took ideas back to share with their chapels, through contributions to worship or suggestions about ways of working in their local Unitarian community.

I always come away from Findhorn inspired and with a renewed sense of purpose, but the sharing of the experience with fellow Unitarians was particularly enriching and I found there were greater opportunities to apply my new learning and insights on return. I'm delighted others will have the opportunity to experience a very special week.

For further details and to discuss funding opportunities contact Valerie Chamberlain, convenor, Findhorn Unitarian Experience Week, [FindhornUnitarianNetwork@gmail.com](mailto:FindhornUnitarianNetwork@gmail.com) or ring, 01257 482314. You may also contact Riena Jackson, secretary on 01473 210064.

# Kereki Trust for Hungarian Unitarians

By Derek McAuley

The General Assembly has received a legacy of nearly £650,000 from Joan Kereki to establish a Trust in memory of her husband, the Rev Gábor Kereki, to enable ministers and ministerial students from the Hungarian Unitarian Church to study at Harris Manchester College, Oxford and Unitarian College, Manchester.

Whilst I was aware of the prospect of such a donation, the eventual amount far exceeded our expectations and is certainly the largest legacy received by the General Assembly in recent years. Joan died on 2 January 2016 and it has taken some time to finalise the estate but £648,580.79 has now been received and has been invested to create a separate 'restricted' fund within the overall General Assembly Accounts. I anticipate as income begins to flow that funds will be available in the next financial year.

Joan Patricia Kereki was born on 2 February 1920. When she moved to Croydon her friend Connie Crookes introduced her to the Unitarian congregation there. She became involved in the Unitarian movement, serving on the National Women's League committee and at the Croydon Unitarian Church. The minister there was Gábor Kereki. Joan became a close friend of Gábor and his wife Connie. Joan helped to nurse Connie when she developed cancer. In her working life Joan had a senior position with the Electricity Council in London. Eight years after Connie's death, as Gábor was due to retire, he and Joan were married. They bought a house in Sanderstead, near Croydon, and attended the Bessels Green Meeting House in Sevenoaks.

Gábor was born in Transylvania in 1914 to a longstanding Unitarian family. He studied theology at the Unitarian Academy in Kolozsvár and began his ministry in 1937 in Budapest, where he also taught religious education. In 1939 he took charge of a new cause in the small village of Kocsord in eastern Hungary near the Russian border. After two years he was recalled to Budapest and served through World War II and the subsequent Russian occupation, caring for citizens of the allied powers and Jews persecuted by the Nazis.

He fled from Hungary in 1947 and studied at Manchester College Oxford becoming minister of Tenterden and Northiam in 1949. A letter in the records at Essex Hall reveals that he wanted to avoid any publicity which might result in any danger to his elderly mother living in Romania or to the Unitarian Church there. In 1961 he moved to Croydon until his retirement in 1984. He gave extensive service to the British Unitarian movement at the highest levels; serving as chair of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association, and trustee of the General Baptist Assembly, Essex Hall Trust and Dr Williams's Library. He was the General Assembly Anniversary Service Preacher in 1981. He was on the committee that produced *Hymns for Living* (the green hymnal) demonstrating his mastery of the English language.

Annette Percy, a good friend of Joan's, tells me that they enjoyed about 10 years of marriage during which, to their great joy, Hungary became free once more. In 1990 they made their first visit to Budapest, where Gábor was able to renew the acquaintance of people with whom he had lost touch during his long years of exile. Joan was by his side, being introduced to old friends and helping him come to terms with getting around

a city which had grown and changed considerably in his absence. Visits to Budapest were frequent and often lasted three months. After his death, Joan continued her interest in the Unitarian church in the village of Kocsord and in the Unitarian cause generally.

This interest has borne fruit in the establishment of the Gábor Kereki Trust, which will benefit Unitarian ministers and ministry students from Transylvania and Hungary for many years to come.

There is a long history of Unitarian students coming to study in Britain; the first arrived in 1860 at Manchester New College, then in London. Prior to World War I, of the 28 students who studied at the college, seven became bishops in Transylvania. In 1911 Miss Emily Sharpe created a Sharpe Hungarian Scholarship which enabled many Transylvanian ministers to study in Manchester. This new Fund will make available secure financial support for the future.

I am sure these scholarships will cement the historic relationship between the British and Hungarian Unitarian Churches as we have much to learn from each other.

The Rev Béla Benczédi Ferenc, bishop of the Hungarian Unitarian Church said, 'The Hungarian Unitarian Church acknowledges gratefully the establishment of the Gábor Kereki Trust as an outstanding opportunity for the ongoing education of our ministers and ministerial students.'

'We honour the memory of Gábor and Joan Kereki and we are grateful for this legacy and their dedication to the cause of Unitarianism in Transylvania and Hungary and to the liberal religion in the world.'

The Gábor Kereki Trust Fund will be a welcome addition to the Sharpe Scholarship and will be beneficial for strengthening the relationship between our churches. We look forward to this possibility to augment our theological education and to further the relationship between our congregations, ministers and Theological Schools.'

College Principal, the Rev Alex Bradley, said, 'Unitarian College, Manchester, has a long and deep connection with the Hungarian Unitarian Church and we are delighted that this most generous legacy will enable scholarly and educational links between Hungarian and British Unitarians to be further developed and deepened.'

The Rev Peter Hewis, Secretary of the Manchester Academy Trust, welcomed the news: 'We look forward to working together on a scheme in conjunction with the General Assembly, Harris Manchester College and the Unitarian College. We have welcomed Hungarian speakers for over 150 years, recently in conjunction with the Unitarian College, Manchester.'

Derek McAuley is Chief Officer of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches.



Joan Kereki

# Extend a warm welcome to all

By Jane Blackall

Unitarians are rightly proud of our historically progressive views on gender and sexuality issues, particularly our part in campaigning for equal marriage, but we still have a lot to learn, as plenty of important LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual) issues are not yet even on many people's radar. Any new person who comes to your church, or anyone who is thinking about giving it a try – or indeed any member of your current congregation – might, unbeknownst-to-you, have any of the identities that we are talking about. And, generally speaking, you can't tell just by looking. So none of us can say that such issues are not relevant to the work and wellbeing of our Unitarian community.

So, at the London Unitarian District meeting in June, 30 people from 15 different congregations gathered at Essex Church, Kensington, for a training day on improving our welcome and inclusion of LGBTQIA+ people. Fred Langridge, a Quaker activist with expertise in this area, worked with me to create a workshop tailored to our particular needs. The purpose was to raise awareness of these concerns and improve understanding of less-visible identities so that we can be more sensitive and inclusive to people from across the whole LGBTQIA+ rainbow.

One of the central assumptions of the training day was that Unitarians welcome all people of goodwill, and we would want LGBTQIA+ people to feel safe to bring their whole selves to church, without hiding or minimising significant parts of their lives or identities. On this basis we assumed that that our communities would want to take people as they come, and accept their identities as valid. At the end of the training day we offered a plan for improving our welcome and being better LGBTQIA+ allies. Here are just a few suggestions to give you a flavour of the practical changes you might consider for your congregation:

- Proclaim your welcome! Make a clear statement of LGBTQIA+ welcome in your literature and on your website, and consider advertising in community publications. To feel welcome in your congregation, members of marginalised groups need to know that the congregation is aware of their issues and that they are welcome as their full selves.
- Ensure that ministers and other congregational leaders are familiar with the specific concerns of bisexual, transgender, and asexual people as well as lesbian and gay people and are



Jane Blackall, left, and Fred Langridge lead a workshop on welcoming LGBTQIA+ people in church.

prepared to minister to LGBTQIA+ people. There is much more gender, sexuality, and relationship diversity than is often acknowledged. Take time to educate yourself.

- Take steps towards more inclusive language. Our language often unconsciously assumes certain things and unintentionally makes people with marginalised identities feel unwelcome. Consider adapting hymns and readings.
- Organise continuing education for your congregation on LGBTQIA+ issues. Consider an occasional Sunday service, training day, or newsletter article to help your congregation develop greater awareness and sensitivity.

During the training day we took time to celebrate the good work that several of our congregations are already doing in this regard. But it is clear that – even for the most welcoming communities – there is always more for all of us to learn. If you missed the training day but would like to learn more from the comfort of your own armchair, please do get in touch, as we would be happy to provide you with a full set of handouts from the day so that you can read and ponder them all.

Jane Blackall is a member of Essex Unitarian Church Kensington. Her email address is: [jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk](mailto:jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk)

the blocks they may have to coming to our church [in relation to their gender, sexuality, or relationship status], but also some of the solutions we could come up with to be more inclusive – from what we show on our website, and providing unisex toilet/s, to giving thought about attendees to church-run 'Women's' or 'Men's' Groups.

One of the suggestions of how to be more inclusive in worship services, was to adjust the gender terminology of hymns and readings. In our worship service after the workshop, it was so helpful to see an example of this: we sang 'We'll Build a Land' which has the chorus line, 'Come build a land, where sisters and brothers...' which for its time was probably very inclusive, in stating 'sister', and not just 'brother.' But in this worship service, the hymn was made even more inclusive, with an adapted chorus line, 'Come build a land, of people united...', which includes non-binary people as well. Such a simple change, but what a difference it makes, showing how easily further inclusivity can be done.'

– Jeannene Powell (Kensington)

– Fru Jeune (Bridport)

'The exercise we did on empathy involved having a number of fictional characters to think about in groups, and ponder not only

# Opinion: Some in the UUA have got it right

By Jim Corrigall

A radical new spirit is stirring among some in the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) of America, which could have real implications for Unitarians in Britain – including for our future survival.

The new thinking in the United States has been gathering for the past few years, and has recently been collected into a book: *Turning Point: Essays on a New Unitarian Universalism* – where 20 leading Unitarian Universalists issue a ‘clarion call for change’. These leaders – who include Ministers’ Association President Cheryl M Walker and former UUA President Peter Morales – argue that a ‘trinity of errors’ has been crippling their organisation.

## Trinity of errors

And what is this trinity of errors? They say it is individualism, atomistic individualism, the idea that faith is all about ‘me’ – about what I believe and want, ‘a faith just for me’. The second error the authors identify is exceptionalism – we’re different from everyone else! – ‘we’re uniquely virtuous, uniquely right’. And the third error? – anti-authoritarianism, including a hostility to the authority of ministers and ministerial office.

The authors trace the roots of these trends back to the 19th century, particularly to Unitarian rebels like Ralph Waldo Emerson and the Transcendentalists. Essentially they argue that what was healthy in Emersonian individuality has hardened into a dogma of ‘individualism’, which makes the building of community difficult if not impossible.

Interestingly for British Unitarians, these UUA leaders were alerted to the scale of the problem they faced by the failure of their growth strategies over the previous decade. And it’s perhaps worth noting that UUA attempts to ‘grow the numbers’ were similar to steps many of us in the UK urged British Unitarians to adopt in this period (Including me! – I recall ‘Jim’s Top Tips for Growth’ – a piece I wrote for *The Inquirer* eight years ago).

By 2012, UUA leaders had begun to face the fact that their strategies were not working – not only was their denomination not growing, they were losing members quite fast, along with the other Protestant denominations in the US. So they asked probing questions: why was their message not getting across? Why were those initially attracted to congregations not staying?

## Answers were not easy

The answers they found (through research and reflection) could not have been easy ones – most fundamentally that

what UUA services were offering people was not what they were looking for in any deep sense. As the former president Peter Morales suggests in his essay, the beautifully crafted services of worship were ‘hitting all the right notes’ but somehow they lacked soul.

These UUA authors (mostly ministers) conclude that a new direction is needed. Several essays bear testimony to profound analysis of the social and religious contours of US society (not true of all the essays, it must be said). But all the authors share the central thesis of the book.

So what do they advocate to replace the ‘trinity of errors’ they identify? Essentially they write of building faith communities based not on individualism but on congregational covenants as a step towards creating ‘Beloved Community’, to building the ‘Kingdom of God’ on Earth. Several of the leaders speak explicitly of the need to bring God back into worship, and of ‘becoming religious’ again. For their new communities of faith to come together, they argue, a focus on something far greater than themselves is needed.

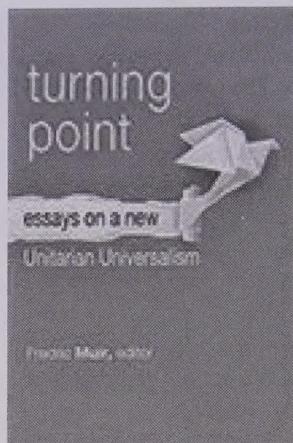
These UUA leaders are not just talking about all this: several of them are already building new communities of faith, and they write about their experiences with insight and honesty. These essays I found the most positive and moving in the book.

## Changing course

Some among the UUA have had the courage to admit their strategy has not worked, and they’ve begun to change course. Now there are important differences between the US and Britain, but many of us in the UK have been inspired by the UUA example over the past several decades.

Do we also need to face the fact that our own strategies for growth (often uncomfortably close to UUA ones) have not been particularly successful either? And will we have the courage to start making the radical changes that may be needed?

*The Rev Jim Corrigall is minister to the Lancashire Collaborative Ministry. The book to which he refers in this column is: ‘Turning Point: Essays on a New Unitarian Universalism’. By Frederic Muir (ed.), ISBN: 9781558967663, Skinner House Books, Boston, 2016. Also available electronically at [Amazon.co.uk](http://Amazon.co.uk)*



Subscribe to *The Inquirer*  
Stay informed  
Keep the Unitarian flame lit  
[www.inquirer.org.uk](http://www.inquirer.org.uk)

# Room for ukuleles, sitars and Barbie!

Are Kendal Unitarians feeling at all disappointed? The news that the Lake District is to become a UNESCO World Heritage Site might have set their hearts a-fluttering, except that their town isn't strictly in the Lake District. It lies just a few miles outside the boundary. A delightful town to visit, nonetheless, and in the town centre stands our chapel with its charming and peaceful gardens. *TripAdvisor* comments on the chapel include, 'Good, reasonably priced, basic tearoom. Superb location in the centre of town, down a yard off the Market Place.' Another adds, 'Regardless of religion or none, if you get the chance to visit this hidden gem, do so. Architecturally beautiful, welcoming and with genuinely friendly and open guides available at times. This building is a haven amid the haste. Well worth seeking out.'

\*\*\*

Lord Clark of Windermere, the person who chaired the bid for World Heritage status, has an interest in an unusual aspect of Unitarian history. He is the author of two books on Victor Grayson, which he published with some help from the late Dr Len Smith, former principal of Unitarian College and member of Kendal congregation. Grayson began training for the Unitarian ministry at UCM before WW1, but bowed out in favour of a career in politics. Lord Clark's books tell of a meteoric career which might well have made this charismatic orator a leader of the Labour party, and possibly prime minister. Alas, his life was beset with problems and inconsistencies which ended in his mysterious disappearance amid conspiracy theories. See, *Labour's Lost Leader* and its updated version, *Victor Grayson: The Man and the Mystery*. A titbit from Lord Clark in the *Guardian* recently reveals how popular a political figure Grayson was in his day. Renowned 20th-century trade-union leader Vic Feather was named, by his ardent socialist parents, Victor Grayson Hardie Feather.

\*\*\*

I recently enjoyed a visit to Belper Chapel in Derbyshire, the oldest nonconformist place of worship in the town, and which is indeed located in a UNESCO World Heritage site. The town's great 18th-century industrial patriarch was the Unitarian Jedidiah Strutt, a hosier and cotton spinner. He developed the Derwent Valley Industrial Complex, including our chapel, and he lies buried, it is believed, in the chapel's crypt. Belper is one of two chapels I know of that has a crypt beneath its building (the other is Wakefield). The present congregation is lively and welcoming to visitors. And, it's the only congregation I know of with a ukulele band.

Walking around the town's delightful River Gardens to view some of this year's well dressings, I was impressed by the Unitarians' beautifully constructed contribution and its theme, *Acceptance*. The accompanying notes tell that the chapel was the first, and is still the only one in the town, to be registered for same-sex marriages.

For those unfamiliar with it, well dressing is a summer custom practised in rural England in which wells, springs or other water sources are decorated with pictorial designs created from flower petals, moss, leaves and twigs. The custom is most closely associated with the Peak District of Derbyshire and Staffordshire. Ironically, considering their chosen theme, Belper Unitarians are excluded, even from 'Observer' status, from the local Churches Together.

\*\*\*



## Funny Old World

By John Midgley

Another Unitarian place of worship that stands in a UNESCO world heritage site is Pálac Unitaria, the home of Prague Unitarians in the Czech Republic. This beautiful, City of Prague location is about as different from Kendal or Belper as one could imagine, but the congregation is equally welcoming – and there is an English-speaking worshipping group there. They don't have an ukulele band, but senior minister, the Rev Dr Petr Samojski, plays the sitar. A group of Czech Unitarians recently toured the UK. (*Story to come in a future edition – ed.*) Yet another UNESCO site is Dârjiu (Hungarian name Székelyderzs) in Transylvania, where the 13th-century fortified Unitarian church is itself UNESCO listed. There may well be more in that part of the world, and if the ongoing campaign to save Rosia Montana in Transylvania from a devastating mining proposal is successful, then another could be added to the list. This campaign has General Assembly support, the hope being that the Rosia Montana district, including our church, will gain UNESCO protection. Are there any more Unitarian UNESCO gems anywhere in the world? I'd love to know.

\*\*\*

Further news from the *Observer's* list of the 100 Best Non-fiction Books of All Time. It includes another Unitarian woman. Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) is named, which will surely please Newington Green Unitarians, she having attended there. I wonder if she ever dreamed of the right to become a minister? Impossible in her time.

\*\*\*

So I wonder what Mary would have made of this news item, that I am grateful to colleague John Carter for spotting. It came from Donna Freitas, Research Associate at the University of Notre Dame's Centre for the Study of Religion and Society. It's about the latest in the range of Barbie dolls. 'The 11.5-inch-tall fictional graduate [Barbie] of Church Divinity School of the Pacific in Berkeley, California, has donned a cassock and surplice and is rector at St. Barbara's-by-the-Sea in (where else?) Malibu, California. She arrived at the church fully accessorised, as is Barbie's custom. Her impeccably tailored ecclesiastical vestments include various coloured chasubles (the sleeveless vestments worn at Mass) for every liturgical season, black clergy shirt with white collar, neat skirt and heels, a laptop with prepared sermon and a miniature, genuine Bible. Apparently a devotee of the "smells and bells" of High Church tradition, the Rev Barbie even has a tiny thurible, a metal vessel used for sending clouds of incense wafting toward heaven.'

It doesn't tell if she's single, married, straight or gay. You can 'friend' her on *facebook* if you want to know more about her, or perhaps to ask, 'Does she play the ukulele, or the sitar?'

*The Rev John Midgley is a retired Unitarian minister.*

# Letters to the Editor

## British arms are killing in Yemen

To the Editor:

*Inquirer* readers donating to charities seeking to get aid into Yemen need also consider the Saudi war aim – cutting the supply lines using British armaments. Saudi has bombed the docks, controls the skies and keeps journalists out. My own MP supports this.

Give generously, but also consider the mind of the man or woman who represents you. Their intention may not be yours. For aid to get through they also have to be convinced.

**Graham Murphy**

Liverpool

## Tribute to *The Inquirer*:

### Never dull, always controversial

To the Editor:

Congratulations to *The Inquirer* on reaching 175 years. I am told that birthdays are important and they are certainly a time for reflection.

I well remember as a child, poorly in bed and unable to go to church, my father, the Rev Harry Maguire B.Sc coming up to my bedroom (sharing with two older sisters) and reading from the current *Inquirer* either a children's story or 'A Tale to Ponder' – every week something different.

After 9 years at Channing School, London, and one year at college I joined the WRNS. And always sang in the choir wherever I was. I was married by my father at his little chapel in Lewes and after the birth of my children whom I took to Hoop Lane, Golders Green every week and especially to the Christmas Eve Carol service.

My husband became a trustee of the Wood Green church now sadly closed. But we helped to start the Enfield and Barnet fellowship with the Rev Tom and Kitty Dalton and many of the services were held in our house.

And still, *The Inquirer* goes on. I knew the former editor, the Rev Keith Gilley quite well from Golders Green and he taught both my daughter and granddaughter at Channing – which in those days was a strictly Unitarian School. I had several pieces appear at different times in *The Inquirer* and

tributes to both of my parents, and my beloved brother Leonard.

But on retirement we moved south and now attend John Pounds at Portsmouth, no longer committee members sadly. But we have seen three changes of minister and now live on supplies – several who come regularly – and find us a welcoming and warm community. Blessings to *The Inquirer*, never dull, ever stimulating and controversial, long may it continue.

**Betty Calderara (née Maguire)**

Portsmouth

## Islamists may be fighting for their way of life

To the Editor:

The Rev William Schulz believes that democracy 'is the best system of government devised by humans,' that it depends on cosmopolitanism which it is, however, in our nature to resist, and that this resistance can be overcome by our power of reason. (*Inquirer*, 1 July) There is, however, a quite different view of the world which was put by the American Anthropological Association to the drafters of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In their submission they wrote, among other things:

'... [I]t is a truism that groups are composed of individuals, and human beings do not function outside the societies of which they form a part. The problem is thus to formulate a statement of human rights that will do more than just phrase respect for the individual. It must also take into full account the individual as a member of the social group of which he is a part, whose sanctioned modes of life shape his behaviour, and with whose fate his own is thus inextricably bound.'

They added, that 'no technique of qualitatively evaluating cultures has been discovered.' In other words, reason doesn't help us in this respect. We continue to ignore this advice at our peril. For example, we are expected to believe that so-called Islamist terrorists have been infected with a mental disease called 'extremism', that this drives them to an irrational hatred of the West, whose way of life they wish to destroy, and that the source of this infection is 'radicalisation'.

In my view this psychologising of our enemy is simply a turning inside-out of

the reality that we are trying to destroy their way of life, and they, however much we may abhor their methods, are fighting to defend it.

**Francis Clark-Lowes**

Brighton

## Perhaps we could use some intellectual welly

To the Editor:

I am gratified that my colleague John Midgley picked up, in his 'Funny Old World' column, on the 'MENSA mayhem' story I passed on to him (*Inquirer*, 1 July). A challenging, amusing extrapolation he made of it – even if omitting that part of the tale was that the newspaper report turned out to be grossly exaggerated! Never believe what you read in (certain!) newspapers!

But he makes a fair point, methinks. For more than a generation to be labelled as 'intellectual' has been pejorative. Being graciously possessed of knowledge beyond the average and a sharp mind can be seriously misused of course. But, at best, as our witness seeks to suggest, we are thereby led nearer the truth of things.

In these so-called post-Truth days, I was very struck by a recent plea, from a Turkish writer in *The Guardian* 'Reformation 2017' series of articles, for 'western thinkers to be bold and speak out ... at least out of respect for those people who pay a heavy price in other parts of the world just to be a public intellectual'. 'An intellectual', she writes, 'is someone who challenges binary oppositions, bridges cultural gaps, has the cognitive flexibility to connect various disciplines and passionately defends a nuanced way of thinking.' That last point seems to me crucial in a world where everyone wants to simplify everything into a nice sound bite or a 'strap line'.

It prompts the thought of how much 'intellectual welly' do we want in our Unitarian worship; in the address in particular? 'Fings ain't wot they used to be,' in this regard, IMHO – and I enjoy and gain spiritual sustenance from a nice homily as much as anyone, but should we be challenging ourselves to try to offer something more?

**The Rev Ernest Baker**

*In retirement ministry*  
Sheffield

# Coventry congregation through the ages

By David E Gillman

The Unitarian cause in Coventry dates from the time of the Great Ejection (1662), when two dispossessed serving clergymen (of St Michael's Church, later to become Coventry Cathedral, and Holy Trinity Church) gathered together a group of like-minded people and subsequently erected their own church premises, in 1700, in Smithford Street in the town centre.

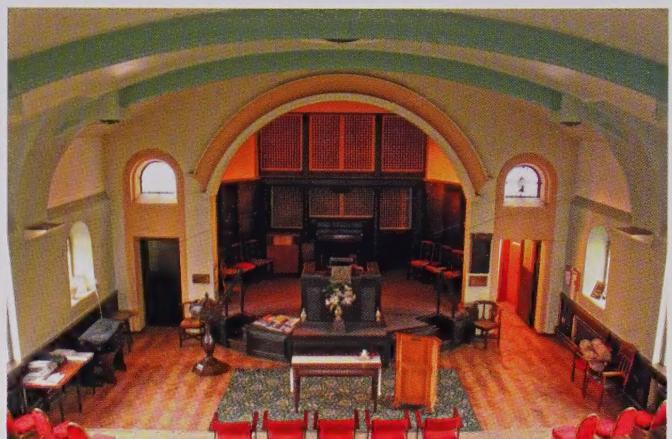


An undated sketch of the 1700 building on Smithford Street, Coventry, by RC Salter

This building admirably suited the needs of the congregation until the arrival from Glasgow in 1928 of the Rev Richard Lee, BA, MA – a man of strong faith, zeal and vision – who expounded the merits of leaving the town centre and rebuilding in an inner suburb (Lower Coundon) a multi-purpose church as a constructive response to the challenge to 'bring the church to the people'. Smithford Street closed in 1934 and its successor, 'The New Great Meeting House', opened in May 1937. The new church, built on old railway goods sidings, faced onto a principal approach road to the town centre (Holyhead Road, the A4114), and still provides a 'visible presence' in its neighbourhood. The old church had been sold to the Coventry Business Corporation for around £12,000. It is a sobering thought that wartime enemy action destroyed the empty church awaiting demolition.

Unitarianism in Coventry can claim several 'distinctions', of which the following three are especially worthy of mention.

- i) It is a popular legend in literary circles that George Eliot (1819-1880) drafted parts of her novel *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) on blank back pages of church hymnbooks during soporific evening sermons!
- ii) Pioneering endeavours by the Rev Henry Solley to found a social fraternal for the needs of working-class men ultimately grew into the national body The Working Men's Club & Institute Union.



A view from the tower staircase of Coventry Great Meeting House, showing the 1935 Hammond Organ behind the pulpit. Photo by Jeffrey Bowes

iii) The Hammond electric-valve organ of the church (a model 'B-3' of 1935) is now officially the oldest working Hammond church instrument in England. It was given a complete recondition by a retired Hammond-trained expert in 2001.

(We also remember how two young members of the church during the 1940s proceeded to undertake vocational training for the Unitarian ministry: Peter Godfrey and the late Trevor Jones.)

In common with most denominations nationwide, Coventry has had its problems: notably property issues and dwindling membership. Various ministry patterns have been tried, including two joint pastorates with Warwick Unitarians. At all times, the District Association has readily offered support and reassurance if approached. An opportunity to dispose of surplus lands in 1994 to the St John Ambulance for their new Divisional HQ brought in much-needed funds.

The church premises provide a venue for around 10 regular groups, including The Coventry Welsh Presbyterian Congregation. The recent implementation of a suggestion that we begin regular user group meetings – as a simple means of fostering cohesion and camaraderie – is being watched with interest.

Visiting worshippers come and go, and, though the congregation is nowadays few in number, they face the future with faith and trust.

David Gillman is Worship Secretary at The Great Meeting House, Coventry. He is a specialist in Ecclesiastical Resource Management.



Cornucopia: A detail of the stained glass moved from the earlier building. There are 12 roundels like this, with motifs representing trades, arts, sciences, and academic and spiritual learning. Photo by Jeffrey Bowes



*The view from the Nightingale Centre. Unifest offers a chance to be out in the glorious Peak District. Photo by Jane Blackall*

## Unifest – a new event for families

Are you interested in three nights of inter-generational, family-focused Unitarian fun? Unifest could be for you! We know that worshiping as a family can be tricky and so Unifest aims to provide opportunities for you to explore your Unitarian faith and values with like-minded family groups.

Unifest will be held at The Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow in the middle of the spectacular Derbyshire Peak District from Thursday, 26 October to Sunday 29th October 2017.

There will be time for all to explore their Unitarian faith through play, art, music and a whole host of other activities along with time to enjoy the wonders of the Derbyshire countryside. Youth leaders will be on hand to lead sessions with the children allowing adults time to attend sessions without them as well as

there being time for inter-generational sessions where we will all be together.

What ever your family make up whether it be grandparents and grandchildren, parents and children, a kind friend who takes someone else's children to church or those in your extended Unitarian family, please think about coming and joining what should be an amazing weekend.

For further information please email John Harley on [jharley@unitarian.org.uk](mailto:jharley@unitarian.org.uk) or Lorna Barry on [lornahill28@googlemail.com](mailto:lornahill28@googlemail.com)

Book directly with the Nightingale Unitarian Conference Centre: [www.thenightingalecentre.org.uk](http://www.thenightingalecentre.org.uk) Or ring: 01298 871218

## Thinking of training for the Unitarian ministry?

Applications for training beginning in autumn 2018 should be received by Monday 2 October 2017. Short-listed applicants will be called for interview at Oxford on 4 – 5 January 2018.

*The format of training provision is currently under review and the 2018 intake will have the opportunity to engage in a more flexible approach to training.*

For an application form please contact:

Mary-Jean Hennis at Unitarian General Assembly, Essex Hall,  
1 – 6 Essex Street, London WC2R 3HY

Phone: 020 7240 2384

Email: [mhennis@unitarian.org.uk](mailto:mhennis@unitarian.org.uk)

To discuss applying, please contact:

Simon Bland – Ministry and Congregational Support Officer

Phone: (0115) 888.2955

Email: [sbland@unitarian.org.uk](mailto:sbland@unitarian.org.uk)